Book Reviews


Ostensibly, Mr. Fuller has written a book, based on his column "Trade Winds" in the Saturday Review, describing a variety of word games suitable for playing at parties. Each of the fifteen chapters of the book is devoted to some particular form of word play, first discussing it and then giving sample games on which the reader may test his verbal astuteness. Since the correct answers to all of the games at the end of a chapter are to be found in the text immediately preceding, the reader has two options. He may either start with the games section, subsequently reading the text that belongs to it in order to find the answers to those items that he couldn't get on his own, or he may read the text section first, treating the games that follow as a memory test.

So much for what the book purports to be. In reality, it is one of the most hilarious books ever written about English word play, and may truly be termed a classic of word humor. No mere review can convey the spirit of the book with any degree of adequacy. All we can do is to urge you to obtain a copy and enjoy it.

Two chapters of the book deviate somewhat from the general pattern and merit special mention. One of them, Chapter 13, deals with the history of Tom Swift and the "Swifties" syndrome. Included are more than 150 examples of "Tom Swifties," such as:

"I'll take the apartment," he said flatly.
"My glasses should arrive tomorrow," he speculated.
"I have a bad heart," he murmured.
"Take my picture," she snapped.
"I'll slip into my bikini," she said briefly.

For anyone who collects "Swifties," this chapter alone makes the book a must. The other one, Chapter 12, is the largest collection we have ever seen of...
short sentences using all 26 letters of the alphabet. Depending on the number of extra letters used, the sentences may be regarded either as approaches to true pangrammatics, or as suitable typing exercises. Altogether, more than 250 of the sentences are included in the chapter. They make for some of the most imaginative, fascinating, out-of-this-world reading you are ever likely to encounter. A few specimens:

BY JOVE, MY QUICK STUDY OF LEXICOGRAPHY WON A PRIZE.
XAVIER PICKED BRIGHT YELLOW JONQUILS FOR MITZI.
SQUIDGY FEZ, BLANK JIMP CRWTH VOX!
TWO JOYFUL VIXENS SQUIRT MILK UPON THE CAGED ZEBRA.
THE BLACK QUARTZ LYNX WAS A JIVY IMP OF GOD.
THE CHANCELLOR OF THE EXCHEQUER EMBEZZLED JUNK FROM GYPSIES WITH VIGOR.
CAMPUS TV QUIZ: JUST WHY IS GOLD BURIED AT FORT KNOX?
UP AT THE ZOO A ROVING OX WAS QUICKLY FED BUG JAM.

Even a few examples in French are thrown in, for good measure. Thus:

ZOE, MA GRANDE FILLE, VEUT QUE JE BOIVE CE WHISKY DON'T JE NE VEUX PAS.

For even wilder examples, see the book itself.


For many years, Swanfeldt's Crossword Puzzle Dictionary has been a standard reference work used by word puzzlers of all sorts. The recently published Third Edition is its first revision in 23 years. The revision is a major one, with the number of answer words to be found in the book increased from more than 200,000 to more than 300,000. This makes it the largest of the crossword puzzle dictionaries now on the market, and an indispensable tool for every word devotee.

In addition to being greatly expanded, the synonyms for each entry have been classified according to letter length. Thus, if we need a six-letter word meaning "garden plant," we do not need to scan all 94 of the names under the heading of "plant-garden," for the 9 six-letter words are in one cluster, conspicuously labeled "6." This sorting by letter length is a distinct advantage in the field of crossword puzzle dictionaries. It was accomplished by using computerized equipment, thereby holding numbering errors to a minimum. According to the publishers, every other puzzle dictionary is thus rendered obsolete.

Although we fully recognize the important position that the new edition of Swanfeldt's occupies in its field, and strongly recommend it to our readers, we cannot be as enthusiastic about it as the publishers evidently are. While the use of electronic equipment may have held numbering errors to an absolute mini-

WORD WAYS
mum, it certainly did not do the same for spelling errors. For instance, in examining the 94 names of garden plants, we noted at least four spelling mistakes: HEREBELL instead of HAREBELL, CINARARIA instead of CINERARIA, LINARARIA instead of LINARIA, and RHODODENDRON instead of RHODODENDRON. To misspell 4 words out of 94 is a percentage of error unworthy of the publishers. Clearly, anyone using the new book must carefully check all words against the dictionary before using them for anything. This is unfortunate.

The claim that all other crossword puzzle dictionaries are now obsolete is unfounded. Compare the new book with others of its class, and you will find many synonyms in the others that are missing from Swanfeldt’s Third Edition. You can make a similar observation about any other puzzle dictionary, of course. Each one is incomplete, each one complements the others, none is a substitute for the others, and the new book is no exception.

What does surprise us, however, is that the Third Edition of Swanfeldt’s doesn’t even render the Second Edition obsolete. Many of the entries included in the Second Edition have been deleted from the Third Edition, so that you need both for best results. For instance, the Second Edition gave these synonyms for the word KNOTTY: “difficult, gnarled, intricate, knarred, knarry, knurled, nodal, nodular, perplexing, puzzling.” Look up KNOTTY in the Third Edition, and you find: “hard, gouty, craggy, complex, difficult, intricate, perplexing.” Altogether, we have 14 synonyms here, of which only 3 are found in both editions. Another 7 are included only in the Second Edition, and the remaining 4 only in the Third Edition.

The Second Edition suffered from certain severe faults. We are disappointed to discover that these faults have been carried over into the Third Edition, without any improvement. A particularly obvious one is the confusion between regular dictionary and crossword puzzle dictionary. You use an ordinary dictionary to determine the meanings of uncommon words, and a crossword puzzle dictionary to find uncommon synonyms for common words. In the light of this distinction, it serves no purpose whatever to include in Swanfeldt’s words such as BURDLY, defined as “husky, strong, athletic”; MAHAJAN, defined as “moneylender”; QUANT, defined as “pole”; and VRAIC, defined as “seaweed.” No one will ever consult Swanfeldt’s for the definitions of BURDLY, MAHAJAN, QUANT, or VRAIC. Similar entries can be found on almost every page of the book. The space allotted to such entries could have been used much more profitably, to provide answer words that will be sought by users of the book. A related waste is illustrated by the synonyms given for the word ABSCESS: “boil, moro, sore, ulcer, fester, lesion, gathering.” Of the 7 synonyms provided, only two—FESTER and GATHERING—are actually defined as “abscess” by the dictionary. The other five words designate conditions vaguely related to an abscess, but not an abscess itself. Yet, there are all sorts of dictionary words specifically defined as “abscess” which have been omitted from Swanfeldt’s: APOSTEME, IMPOSTUME, IMPOSTHUME, INCOME, etc. It is not logical to omit direct synonyms, replacing them with words of tenuous connection.

year after the appearance of Webster's Third Edition, is still mired in Web·
unexplored. Take a simple case—the word ERROR. One of the synonyms for
ERROR found in Webster's Third Edition is the everyday word “goof.” It
ought to be in Swanfeldt's Third Edition, but it isn't.

Our criticism of the book is not unfair. The examples cited are fully repre­
sentative of what is found on its every page. We shall hopefully await the
appearance of a Fourth Edition, geared to the needs of puzzlers. In the mean­
time, we’ll use the Third Edition as one of the best synonymicons available to
the general public.

FROM BED TO VERSE, by Harold H. Hart. 192 pages. Hart Publishing Com­

The author of this soft-cover volume describes it as a book of word games
and humorous stanzas for the sophisticated adult—material that is geared to
help one pleasantly while away an odd hour or two, with puzzles, boners,
crosswords, and quizzes rounding out the fare. He recommends it as great for
a train ride, a plane ride, a convalescent, or just ordinary bedtime reading.

This seems like a pretty accurate assessment of the book to us. A consider­
able variety of material is included, most of it intended to entertain or divert.
Some examples:

One 24-page section is devoted to recounting the details of nine unsolved
historical mysteries, such as that of the Borden Murder Case, or of the Man
in the Iron Mask. Following the presentation of each mystery are two or three
suggested possible explanations or solutions. Most of the cases make for ab­
sorbing reading.

A series of illustrated “common-sense” puzzles occupies some 13 pages. Lin­
guistic, mathematical, and pictorial elements enter into these puzzles—a mis­
cellany with something for everyone.

A section of 20 pages, entitled “Funny Stories,” is more in the category of
jokes than long stories. Very few of the items exceed half a page in length.

A set of 19 crossword puzzles is included. All of them are the standard,
15 x 15, size. As far as level of difficulty is concerned, they are about as easy
as the average puzzle in a crossword magazine.

Sundries in the book include a small collection of Tom Swifties, letter mazes
in which words belonging to specified categories are to be traced out, insults,
wisecracks, limericks, and other casual poetry.

The repeated use of the word “sophisticated” on the book covers suggests
risqué material inside, but that implication is largely unfounded. We recom­
end the book.

WORD WAYS

Some of our
content on
puzzles.

BOMBAUG
1961.

BORGMAN
York, 1965.

BORGMAN
York, 1967.

CARROLL,
Martin Gar­
d and New Yo
Crossword P
1964.

ESAR, Evan
Schuster, Ne
FRIEND, J.
New York an
FULLER, Jo
York, 1966.

GAINES,
GARDNER,
New York, 1
KAHN, Davi
KAUFMAN,
Edition. Dow
KAUFMAN,
York, 1957.
MARSHAL
Brooklyn, Ne